

## *Introduction*

Kenneth L. Ames

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The papers in this volume grew out of two conferences on the colonial revival sponsored by Winterthur Museum in 1981 and 1982. The "Winterthur Conference on the Colonial Revival in America" brought together more than two dozen speakers in addition to a musician and a pair of dancers for two very busy and rewarding days in November 1981. The second conference, a lively one-day exploration titled "Colonial Revival Gardens: Real and Romanticized," was organized by Winterthur's coordinator of gardens education programs Philip G. Correll and took place in March of the following year. Together, these two programs were probably the most extensive and diversified examination ever undertaken of the colonial revival theme in American material culture.

Why study the theme so thoroughly? Ideally, of course, inquiry into any episode of the past yields valuable lessons about the human condition, but study of the colonial revival offers even more specific and direct rewards. The colonial revival is not simply another historic episode locked into the past, but a phenomenon that continues with impressive vitality into the present day as an ongoing part of our own culture. The colonial theme has, to use a word fashionable nearly two decades ago, "relevance" matched by few other historic phenomena. The colonial is of the past, but it is also very much of the present. We can hardly fail to miss it in the modern environment.

It is a public phenomenon fraught with autobiographical connections. I believe that colonial aspects of America's material culture are important because I encounter them so frequently. In my own (admittedly impressionistic) examination of the landscape—both public and

domestic—I have been struck by how common colonial forms are. I would not go so far as to say that colonial revival structures constitute the majority of what I see—they are clearly less prevalent in some periods and in some places than in others—but they are remarkably common. They may not be uniform in appearance, but they draw upon a common, fluid and flexible, language of colonial design. Under the colonial rubric we can find extraordinary varieties and digressions as well as regional interpretations with startlingly different visual effects, all of which nevertheless embody some notion of the colonial.

Visions or versions of the colonial past can be found on a remarkable range of structures, including supermarkets, gas stations, shopping centers, post offices, governmental structures of many kinds, ice-cream parlors, churches, and a surprising number of other forms wherever building has taken place in the last century. But the American home, particularly the suburban single-family home, is the major vehicle for the expression of colonial ideas in building. Indeed, the colonial seems to have become a dominant paradigm for domestic architecture in the United States.

Like millions of Americans, I live in a colonial revival tract house. I cannot say exactly that I ended up there by choice, since most of my options were other colonial tract houses. Delaware unquestionably has demographic and historical peculiarities that play a large role in shaping the kind of housing available, but similar situations prevail elsewhere, especially east of the Mississippi. When I leave my colonial tract house in the morning, I drive by about fifteen miles of other colonial houses, some older, some newer, some cheaper, some significantly more expensive (one of my favorites is a replica of Mount Vernon), and go to work at Winterthur Museum. Winterthur is many things, but chief among them it is a monument to one person's fascination with the American colonial past, and it is a generator and perpetuator of interest in things colonial.

Moving from the exterior landscape to the domestic interior, the visibility of the colonial actually increases. I have seen few homes without some touches of the colonial; I have seen many with little else. As with domestic architecture, the variety of colonial furnishings is great. To call a group of furnishings colonial is not even to hint that the individual items look the same. We do not see superficial resemblance to some fixed notion of the colonial when we survey furnishings over many years;

rather, we find a shifting understanding of ways to express colonial qualities within changing patterns of preferences and even changing definitions of the term *colonial* itself. Concept, not form, provides the continuity.

We study this topic, then, because it is an ongoing epic, a part of our everyday world. We study it for the very reason that it seems familiar and unexceptional; anthropologists remind us that the commonplace is the best means by which to understand central values and assumptions of a culture. I will not claim that exploring the colonial revival will crack the riddle of the meaning of American life, but I do think that colonial objects, icons, and ideas are more imbedded in American culture than may at first seem apparent.

In the call for papers that went out a year or so before the November 1981 conference we asked for speakers willing to discuss some aspects of the "colonial revival in America." We decided that it was possible to interpret the phrase in at least two different—although overlapping—ways. The colonial revival could be viewed in the conventional and relatively narrow sense of a discrete phase of American architectural and furnishings history usually thought of as beginning about the time of the Centennial and dying out with the advent of the modern movement in the early twentieth century. But the phrase could also be given broader meaning, encompassing virtually any variety of artifactual interaction with visions of colonial America. Defined in this broader sense, the colonial revival might be seen less as a time-bound episode in American cultural history and more as a persisting and pervasive component of American culture with antecedents reaching surprisingly far back into the American past. Some of the conference papers, including a number of those developed for inclusion in this volume, fit within the first (more conventional) definition, but others investigate issues and artifacts dating from before 1876, and still others concentrate on events many years after the Centennial, charting varying interactions with the colonial past well into the twentieth century.

As originally planned, the 1981 and 1982 conferences aimed at three interlocking goals, which have been attained in this collection of papers with considerable if varied success. First, we tried to put together programs sufficiently rich and diverse in people, topics, and viewpoints to generate a body of resource material and ways of thinking about the material that would be useful to anyone studying references to the colo-

nial past in American material culture. In short, our most basic goal was to generate and record a significant and suggestive body of research. I think this goal has been amply achieved in these papers.

The second goal was to move beyond exposition to examine ways objects or events might be related to larger cultural issues. This has been accomplished here with a good deal of success through both direct and indirect means. Some essays are directly conjectural, speculating about the meanings of their material and its relationship to other cultural activities. Others venture less conjecture, but even these prod us toward analysis indirectly by offering accounts of artifacts and events that seem, at least at first glance, off the beaten paths of colonial revival or even material culture study. Particularly as they are juxtaposed with the other papers, these essays help us to reexamine some of our compartmentalized and complacent ways of arranging the past in our minds and discourse.

Indeed, one of the great values of this collection of papers is its diversity of theme and method, which produces a healthy confusion about the topic that should convince most readers that the whole business is neither simple nor clear. I cannot claim that these essays are the keys to understanding and explaining all the ways Americans have recorded, collected, restored, displayed, replicated, emulated, celebrated, manipulated, or otherwise interacted with the colonial American past, but surely they constitute a major aid to thinking about these issues.

The third goal, frankly, was not one that we actually expected the conferences—or this volume—to meet. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that these essays are means toward this final goal. Through an understanding of the ways people in this country made the past into usable history, we hoped to contribute—however tentatively—to material culture and historical theory. The truth is that both material culture and historical study at present tend to operate in a theoretical vacuum. While this volume does not dramatically change the situation, thoughtful readers will find richly implicit theoretical assumptions here on which to construct their own conceptual apparatus to help us grapple more productively with human behavior and, more specifically, with human behavior that involves objects from the past or relating to the past.

My own thinking about the assumptions implicit in these papers has yielded a provisional list of ten observations on the nature of the colo-

nial revival. I offer these as a spur to further thought and as generalizing cement to bind the particularistic essays more tightly together.

1. The interactions with the colonial past chronicled here are extraordinarily complex. Given episodes may be readily comprehensible by themselves, but as we begin to pile one on top of another our view of the subject blurs. We soon learn that this matter cannot easily be encompassed, and if the subject cannot be thought about easily, it cannot be explained easily either.

2. Colonialism is not a surface phenomenon, a thin veneer over the real body of American life, but a network of communications and linkages that reaches deep into American experience and behavior. No single pivotal event generates these interactions with the colonial past; no solitary origin can be discovered. The motivations are many and complex, inextricably intertwined with fundamental aspects of life in America and the modern world.

3. If the colonial revival defies easy conceptualization and suggests complicated origins, its meanings also refuse to fall into clear and predictable patterns. Like classicism, the colonial has no fixed symbolic content but serves instead as a nearly bottomless pool of possibilities, sometimes surprising in the range of needs it fulfills. Occasional consistencies emerge among these needs, but we are frequently startled by the fertility of the imagination in creating meanings from the unprotesting past. As an image or experience recedes into the past, certain features are effaced and others are accentuated, depending on the new conditions that affect our present and, therefore, affect our way of looking at the past. Over time one image of the past is erased and replaced by newly generated images informed and shaped by supplementary and altered conceptions and definitions.

4. Since the process of reinterpreting, revising, rethinking, or reevaluating the past may go on continuously, propelled by newer information or exigencies, it sometimes happens that whatever actually occurred, whatever an object or an environment originally looked like may not be important for a given group at a given moment. The requirement to possess a past as we need it is often more pressing than any motive of historical accuracy. What one age deems as historical accuracy a later one sees as naïveté or self-deception. The transformation of images to meet historical needs takes place not only in the mind



but in the material world as well. The physical past can be shaped or reshaped to fit a society's requirements. It is therefore true that even manifestly authentic materials are hardly immune to alteration or destruction solely by virtue of their design or structural integrity. If they fail to fit current needs, the most pristine remnants of the past may fall prey to demolition. In some of the essays in this volume we see how what might have actually existed at some point in the past is of little significance at a later point. Williamsburg (treated by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., in "The Colonial Revival in the Public Eye: Williamsburg and Early Garden Restoration") and Litchfield (studied in William Butler's "Another City upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut, and the Colonial Revival") are only particularly obvious cases. While ideas about the past depend heavily on objects for their survival, it is also possible to arrange or modify objects to suit a particular idea or to make an idea appealing.

5. The process of making history is subject to complexities and contradictions. History is an artificial, fragmented, and biased production. The apparent but illusory directness of our language and the way certain emphases are made to seem not only correct but also inevitable disguise the ambiguity of the entire venture. Material culture history, still in its infancy, is a special case within the larger realm of history, replete with a distinctive group of rarely acknowledged problems. Among the most crucial is that objects have no single past but an unbroken sequence of past times leading backward from the present moment. Moreover, there is no ideal spot on the temporal continuum that inherently deserves emphasis. In selecting one past moment we necessarily shut out the possibility of other past moments—at least for a time. In elevating or admiring one piece of the past, we tend to ignore and devalue others. One reality lives at the expense of countless others.

Repeatedly we see just this happening, sometimes with unsettling, even grotesque results. One variety of this selective vision is found in conjunction with collecting and is noteworthy both for the cognitive machinations involved in it and for the frequency with which it recurs. We see such selectivity most blatantly in the behavior of some of the early collectors of colonial artifacts and even in collectors today who look for the same "good luck" their early counterparts enjoyed. Indeed, to read accounts of early collecting is to discover a remarkable fusion of exquisite sensibility for objects and incredible insensitivity to human

beings. As Beverly Seaton reminds us in "A Pedigree for a New Century: The Colonial Experience in Popular Historical Novels, 1890–1910," some of the early collectors saw themselves as rescuing old china and other historic items from people too ignorant to value them. Such collectors had little sympathy for the "rustics" from whom they attempted to buy objects at grossly undervalued prices, and they had no interest in the meanings of the objects in the lives of those who had owned them. Exploitation and predation, although obviously operative, are less significant here than the process of redefinition involved in transforming the objects from old things in country homes to prized attributes of gracious living in sophisticated settings. In this process what is uncontestedly known about the objects—their association with the rustics—and just as uncontestedly unappreciated may be eagerly forgotten in favor of unverifiable but much more appealing assumptions about old-time craftsmanship, the piety and patriotism of the original owners, and the moral superiority of an earlier age. A similar process occurs whenever a structure or object is restored and whenever a neighborhood is gentrified. The social complexity and ambivalence to which gentrification gives rise constitute a good shorthand for grasping the essentials of the process. Questions we might ask as we watch colonial revivalism at work now or in the past address problems of determining the values and assumptions underlying the celebration of the colonial at the expense of subsequent times and people.

6. That all objects from the past are also of the present is an observation derived predictably if also somewhat paradoxically from the preceding one. This dual nature gives objects the special qualities and properties they possess. If we look back again for a moment at our early collectors we see that it is past associations that make the objects into collectible artifacts; nevertheless, age and authenticity are necessary rather than sufficient sources of value. For the early collectors it was also vital that the objects could be possessed and moved, bought and sold. In spite of being objects from the past, then, they were—and are—also part of present economic exchange systems. We might even argue that their role as present commodities outranks their historical roles. For the predatory collector the principal function of history is to help limit the pool of comparable objects and to add a degree of difficulty and chance to the process of acquisition. Although allegedly an exercise in historical study, collecting can be ahistorical if not downright antihistorical.

If we allow observations 5 and 6 a degree of validity, we see how emphasis on a moment in the past or in the present is at odds with emerging historical interest in process, in the ongoing sequence of events, behavior, will, and actions that leave some imprint on a place or an object. An object altered admits to the passage of time, to changes in attitudes, ideas, needs, and uses. If objects emit mixed signals, it is with the resulting confusion, the cacophony of indicators, that the historian should try to chart changing mentalities and conditions. Yet to some who deal with objects, mixed and jumbled signals are anathema because they admit to the existence of significant activity between the desired time, usually at or near the beginning of the object in question, and the present. When we admit to the passage of time and to alternative visions and values, objects lose their clear programmatic role, and those who behold the objects are cast adrift on the seas of complex historical actuality. Antiques and deliberately restored buildings or environments tend to be frozen ahistorical objects outside the flow of time and human action. But an unaltered building in an environment marked by pronounced change may be judged ahistorical in itself even though it serves as an index to the change all around it. As Hosmer notes in "The Colonial Revival in the Public Eye," early dialogues with the colonial have just begun to concern those historians who study historical process and shifting patterns in values and attitudes.

7. The decision to colonialize is always an act of choice—an effort grounded in intention—and a choice necessarily made over other choices. Because the essayists were invited to focus on colonializing, it is only appropriate that they devote their greatest attention to that subject, and no one will suppose them ignorant of the larger world of choices lying beyond the focus of their essays. But readers will profit by attempting to place the events and objects described here into a fuller setting. People are motivated as much by negative drives as they are by positive; the desire to reject and dissociate from may be as strong as the desire to accept and affiliate with. The two kinds of behavior can be reciprocal, and we may find cultural activities generated by positive and negative motivations simultaneously. To put the matter more prosaically, many cultural accomplishments have been propelled by a strong desire *not* to be confused with or associated with other people. Some episodes of the colonial revival fall into this category, often with the kind of xenophobic implications explored centrally in William B. Rhoads's "Colonial Revival

and the Americanization of Immigrants" and investigated more peripherally elsewhere in this volume.

8. What happens in the episodes gathered in these essays is in no way the natural, predictable, or inevitable turn of events. We fail to seize a productive approach to this material if we slip into the comfortable habit of seeing in it the normal or obvious order of things. In order to crack the cultural meaning of a phenomenon—particularly one that does *seem* the regular order of things—we profit from obtaining the perspective of an outsider. As long as we can maintain a sense of being startled by what we see, even an inclination to believe we have stumbled onto truly weird behavior, we have a better chance of appreciating how a phenomenon actually functions in our culture or in a culture of the past. Once we begin to think that what we encounter is perfectly reasonable and inevitable, we are no longer efficient analysts, and deeper meanings of the phenomena we confront are likely to elude us.

9. Objects play a central role in the processes of the colonial revival. This may seem self-evident or a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet it is no foregone conclusion that the processes of the colonial revival should be so deeply grounded in objects. Nevertheless, if we were to turn the problem around and start with an inquiry into the nature of the colonial revival and the forms it takes, we would probably come up with much the same conclusion: in these processes objects are crucial. It is difficult to follow the strand of the colonial very far without reference to objects. As Celia Betsky's "Inside the Past: The Interior and the Colonial Revival in American Art and Literature, 1860–1914" and Seaton's "Pedigree for a New Century" demonstrate, the colonial revival has literary manifestations, and the colonial surely ripples through other forms of verbal behavior, but the mind runs out of suggestions fast if we exclude material culture. We can partially explain this situation by recalling the double role that objects so frequently play: they are expressions of the culture, and they are the medium that reinforces the culture or that creates some new culture. Material culture has always been one of the major means of controlling or shaping society. Whether the intention that motivates the manipulation of objects is judged benevolent or malevolent is of secondary significance. It is more important merely to realize that objects have social impact. And such impact is a leitmotiv running through these papers, all of which closely relate objects to the dynamics of human interaction.



10. One final observation summarizes and encapsulates the previous ones and brings us back into confrontation with the relationship between material artifacts and the study of history: the past is most evocatively preserved in physical surroundings. As Maurice Halbwachs noted in *The Collective Memory* (1950; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1980), collective memories (or what we generally think of as history) unfold within spatial frameworks. The legitimacy of these memories (or histories) is irrelevant; the critical issue is that ideas, events, and people endure because objects do. It seems to me that this underlies the entire set of papers and explains the centrality of objects in a retrospective phenomenon like the colonial revival.

If the multifaceted engagements with the colonial charted here have no single cause or impetus, we can at least identify some of the major forces that seem to propel them. These might be divided into two general groups: *persisting* and *changing*.

The persisting forces include fundamental and recurring impulses, like ancestor worship and the need to generate myths of beginnings. Neither of these (in actuality facets of the same irrational emotional needs) is often acknowledged in discussions of the colonial revival. For that matter, neither is often entertained explicitly in general literature about America, as if such behavior, appropriate for "less civilized" peoples in some other part of the world, were cause for embarrassment among us here. At least some of the colonial revival gestures discussed in this volume can be viewed as variations on these ubiquitous—if rarely discussed—themes.

Not far remote from such forces as ancestor worship and myths of origin are myths of a golden age. These too are persisting impulses, capable of emerging in any social setting, particularly one undergoing dynamic change. In golden-age myths the colonial dimension is largely a product of circumstance, as it is with ancestor worship and myths of origin. Different ancestors and different origins would have inspired other settings for visions of a golden age.

In opposition to persisting forces are more specifically historical movements, most of which seem to cluster in three sets: (1) responses to modernization, (2) expressions of nationalism, and (3) strategies to cope with America's social and cultural diversity. The first two of these represent American variations on international themes, but the third is particularly an American case.

What tend often to be ignored in looking at the American colonial revival are its parallels with behavior in other parts of the world. A narrow obsession with American exceptionalism obscures the strands that tie American cultural experience to concurrent, antecedent, or subsequent behavior elsewhere. This is particularly true if we examine colonializing behavior as a response to modernization. However one defines it, modernization is a complex international phenomenon that originated in western Europe—Britain in particular—then spread to this country, and is still dawning on other areas of the world. Sweeping changes on many levels, incorporating technological, industrial, social, demographic, economic, cultural, and other transformations, bring both a profound sense of gain and an equally profound sense of loss. The sense of gain is largely reflected in an increased sentiment of material well-being; the sense of loss is generated by the disappearance of once-familiar objects or events that are no longer required in the modernized society. Social reaction to loss takes many forms. We may see a rise of interest in folklore and folkways at the very moment when such lore and such ways are becoming obsolete. Or we may witness the cultural reevaluation of preindustrial labor and handicraft, both of which were taken for granted before the industrial age made handicraft a vanishing folkway and thereby endowed it with new meanings. Perhaps ironically, those whose livelihoods and fortunes are based on industrialism are often those who most enthusiastically sing the praises of preindustrial ways and who become most deeply committed to their preservation.

Central elements of the response to modernism are an orientation toward either preindustrial times in the past or nonindustrial alternatives in the present, an emphasis on handicraft, an antiurban bias—which usually translates into an emphasis on rural life—and an inclination to stress simple rather than complex social structures, homogeneous, cooperative folk rather than diverse, competitive people. These are the reverse of the most dominant features of modernism. Similar patterns with only minor variations can be found in most western European nations.

That modernization was more critical in generating the colonial revival ← in America than motivations grounded in political history, for example, is attested to by the curious but readily documentable fact that *colonial* was loosely used well into the twentieth century to mean the period before about 1840. That is, it described the period before the onset of

Victorianism, which in America is virtually interchangeable with modernization. In this country, *colonial* can be seen as a code word for anti- or non-Victorian, anti- or nonmodern.

A subset of these antimodern sentiments is an emphasis on domesticity. By no means do all of these papers address the colonial revival in a domestic setting, but home life is a most salient dimension of the phenomenon. As my earlier comments suggest, the domestic sphere may well be the major focus of colonializing activity. While it is not clear that the nineteenth-century American emphasis on domesticity can be seen wholly as a response to modernization, some links seem likely. Certainly, the changing configurations and furnishings of the home consume an inordinate amount of time and energy and take curious forms. The period room is a forceful reminder of the evocative power of domesticity and of the nineteenth-century inclination to think both literally and metaphorically in terms of rooms. Premodern relics play central roles in period rooms, so that we find it possible to recite a list of objects high in symbolic content, as Betsky has done in "Inside the Past."

Another instance in which the response to modernism tended to focus on domesticity is the extraordinary emphasis on the kitchen as a conveyor of multiple values and meanings. The so-called New England kitchens that were so much a part of early colonial revival activities are particularly telling manifestations of this interest. As Rodris Roth's "New England or 'Olde Tyme' Kitchen Exhibit at Nineteenth-Century Fairs" demonstrates, these allegedly rural, preindustrial spaces set up in the most thoroughly urbanized areas of the industrial North were decked out with heavily evocative artifacts like spinning wheels and tall clocks. The kitchens pulled together a number of anthropologically and sociologically charged themes. As kitchens they acknowledged the significance of foodways as cultural carriers and implements of social bonding. As areas in the home normally associated with women, kitchens also provided spaces for female activities that may be seen as equivalents to the heroic male events and accomplishments of the older time, fitting nicely within mid nineteenth-century notions of separate spheres of influence for men and women. The kitchens also offered a bit of social irony and inversion. In them, elegant folk escaped from some of the social dogma and decorum of their own day to dine and chat in non-formal spaces radically different from the heavily ritualized rooms in which their dining activities normally took place. What these people

might never have done in the kitchens of their own homes or in those of their social peers was both enjoyable and acceptable in these short-term inversions of the modern world. The appeal of the New England kitchens was pervasive, and the exhibits outlived the fairs that spawned them. As Melinda Young Frye suggests in "The Beginnings of the Period Room in American Museums: Charles P. Wilcomb's Colonial Kitchens, 1896, 1906, 1910," they were the origin of the period room, still a popular museum-installation type today.

Is nationalism part of modernization, or are the two merely coexistent? For most of the Europeanized world during the nineteenth century, nationalism was an important political and cultural force. Part of nation-building is the need to create a central national experience and a central core of myths and values. Repeatedly in the accounts of American colonial revival efforts we find that patriotism is perceived as a major motive for preservation or restoration. Early examples, like Mount Vernon or Washington's Headquarters at Newburgh, New York, were explained almost wholly in patriotic terms. Today these expressions of patriotic fervor seem somewhat quaint and naive, and we may be inclined to view the patriotic impulses as historic artifacts themselves. The evidence of the past, including the not-so-distant past, demonstrates that people realized the necessity of preserving relics in order to keep ideas and ideals alive. The most abstract cultural values need to be grounded in some tangible and verifiable truths. Some of these relics, like Mount Vernon, were unique but were given widespread impact through such strategies as designing a governing board with representatives from all states. But some artifacts, particularly house styles and household furnishings, could be replicated readily, making it possible to spread patriotic thoughts and feelings to almost any place in the nation. That the colonial became the vehicle for national identity is again largely an accident of history, since any objects associated with the formative years of nation-building probably could have been transformed into positive and potent icons of that period.

The third cluster of themes, which I have identified as responses to cultural diversification, might be seen as a particularly American problem within the larger context of nationalism. One of the distinguishing characteristics of this country, and an important part of its international image, is its role as a home for people of many nationalities. While an ethnically heterogeneous citizenry fostered America's image as a land of prosperity open to all, it created significant social tensions, both among



the older stock, which felt threatened on many levels by the newcomers, and among the newcomers themselves, the "uprooted," who sometimes found social and cultural change excruciatingly difficult. Here the role of the colonial revival was to expedite acculturation and socialization. Rhoads treats this role explicitly in terms of Americanization. That the language for Americanization was colonial is, again, a historic accident, but this did not reduce its effectiveness as a central core around which a cohesive society might be fabricated from disparate parts.

This core of beliefs, values, and even rituals has sometimes been called a civil religion, although it is not at all clear that viewing such behavior as religious leads to productive insights. All societies need shared symbols and values; without them they are only an agglomeration of people. Although there are parallels between the colonial revival and religion—in functional and structural properties and because such systems ultimately rest on untestable articles of faith—it is more significant to note that every society evolves the rules by which it will operate and the symbols it will honor, and to describe these universal processes of social coherence as religion stretches the word beyond useful meaning. Better to see the extraordinary success of the colonial revival into our own day as evidence of a need to continue to reaffirm in nonverbal terms certain tenets and values perceived as central to American life and the American experience.

→ The most fundamental question this collection of essays raises is whether deep immersion into the past can be read as a positive, affirmative action or whether it might be seen more accurately as an act of cultural desperation. The evidence does not support a rosy view of the colonial revival, which strikes me first and foremost as the product of a reactive stance. In the majority of the cases outlined in this book, the colonial is more an instance of cultural retaliation than a positive statement of social outreach. Healthy organisms live in the present; those who live mostly in the past cannot or will not deal with the present. This is true for both individuals and societies. My judgment is that while a little colonial revival may be a good thing, a great deal of it is a sign of personal or group disorder. I am perfectly willing to be persuaded to the contrary, but such persuasion is not to be found in these essays. I am curious to know what others will think after reading this volume and reflecting on its testimony.

## *Another City upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut, and the Colonial Revival*

### William Butler

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This paper analyzes the changing image of the New England village and how it became a national symbol during the colonial revival. Litchfield, Connecticut, a stereotypical town that popular sentiment perceives as a realistic representation of an eighteenth-century colonial village, is in fact an idealized interpretation of what elite society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thought was colonial.<sup>1</sup>

A typical New England town in the modern landscape is a nucleated village of white clapboard houses lining elm-shaded streets, with a simple Congregational church, a general store, and a small schoolhouse surrounding a parklike green (fig. 1). We perceive this classic setting as

<sup>1</sup> The term *colonial* in the context of this study requires an explanation. When I document and interpret the colonial landscape of Litchfield I am referring to 1719–80, or roughly from the town's first English settlement to just before the close of the Revolution. *Colonial* is used popularly and loosely today to describe the style and epoch of the eighteenth century, particularly the years surrounding the Revolution. During the colonial revival, popular culture thought of the colonial period as starting in 1620, with the landing of the Pilgrims, and ending around 1840, with the beginnings of industrialization. Some architectural historians during the colonial revival were aware of the inexact use of this word: C. Matlack Price coincidentally raised this issue in "Historic Houses of Litchfield," *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* 5, no. 3 (June 1919): 13–14. Also in this article (and for the first time in the monograph series), Price discussed the stereotypical image of the New England town, using Litchfield as an example.



# The Colonial Revival in America

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PUBLISHED FOR

The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum

WINTERTHUR, DELAWARE

W·W·Norton & Company

NEW YORK

LONDON

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Published simultaneously in Canada by Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street,  
Markham, Ontario L3R 1B4.  
Printed in the United States of America.

The text of this book is composed in Electra, with  
display type set in Garamond. Composition and  
manufacturing by The Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group.

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Main entry under title:

The Colonial revival in America.

"Published for The Henry Francis du Pont  
Winterthur Museum."

Includes index.

1. Colonial revival (Art)—Addresses, essays,  
lectures. 2. Arts, Modern—19th century—United  
States—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Axelrod,  
Alan, 1952—. II. Henry Francis du Pont  
Winterthur Museum.

ISBN 0-393-01942-X

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 37 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3NU

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

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